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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 001774

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/05/2016

TAGS: PGOV PHUM IS GOI INTERNAL ISRAELI SOCIETY

SUBJECT: A SPRING OF LIEBERMAN'S DISCONTENT: NO
RUSSIAN-SPEAKING IMMIGRANTS IN CABINET

REF: A. TEL AVIV 1728

B. TEL AVIV 1612

Classified By: A/DCM Norm Olsen for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

1. (C) The absence from Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's 25-member Cabinet of even a single representative from the Russian-speaking immigrant community -- despite that community's electoral strength -- has elicited strong criticism from Yisrael Beiteinu leader Avigdor Lieberman and Kadima MK Marina Solodkin. Ha'aretz reported May 5 that not since 1996 has there been a Cabinet without any Russian-speaking immigrants and that Russian-speaking Kadima members "are already...calling for demonstrations." Poloffs observed at least a hundred Lieberman supporters demonstrating outside the Knesset May 4 -- the day the new government was sworn in. Moscow-born Solodkin, who had been serving as immigration deputy minister in the interim government, registered her displeasure for not being appointed minister of immigration and absorption by absenting herself from the Knesset's vote of confidence on the new government. Knesset contacts indicated to poloffs that Olmert passed over Solodkin because he was dissatisfied with her ability to attract the Russian-speaking vote to Kadima during the election. When poloffs met Lieberman May 4 outside the Knesset plenary session, he criticized Olmert for choosing Ze'ev Boim -- whom he described as Olmert's close friend -- over Solodkin. Betraying his own frustrations over being left outside the government, Lieberman gruffly asserted that Olmert's 67-MK coalition would not last six months.

2. (C) Olmert himself indicated in his May 4 speech introducing his new government that an impasse exists in coalition talks with Lieberman, while at the same time he expressed the belief that he "can complete the (coalition) negotiations, and reach an agreement with United Torah Judaism (UTJ) and Meretz." Meretz MK Zahava Gal-On and UTJ MK Rabbi Moshe Gafni confirmed to poloffs separately May 4 that their respective parties are still involved in coalition negotiations with Kadima. Lieberman, however, may have fully burned his bridges to the coalition when, in his May 4 speech on the new government, he called for a Nuremberg-like trial for Israeli-Arab MKs who met in April with Hamas members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and he expressed the hope that just as Nazi "collaborators" were executed so would this be the fate of "collaborators" in Israel. Lieberman's statements prompted Olmert to publicly declare his confidence that Jewish and Arab MKs alike act in the interest of Israel.

3. (C) Comment: Lieberman's outburst may have cost him any hope of either entering the government or of seizing the role of opposition leader from Likud Party Chairman Binyamin Netanyahu, who holds that mantle as the head of the largest party in the opposition.

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